

JOHNSON LIFE IN THE ROLLER MILL

In those gone-away days, bread was baked with homemade yeast, and Mrs. Johnson always kept several 2 quart bottles filled with live yeast so that when people came to the mill and told Mr. Johnson that the flour wasn't good he would send them to the house to get a new start of yeast, so that the next batch of bread that they made from the flour would be satisfactory. Mrs. Johnson often soaked strips of gauze in the bottles of live yeast, and then dried the gauze, then alternately soaked and dried them until the gauze was thoroughly saturated with the yeast. Then when the gauze was dried she mailed them in envelopes to different people around the country who needed a new start of yeast. When these strips of gauze were delivered the women would put the strip of gauze in a bottle of warm potato water and sugar and thereby get a new start of yeast.

The family at the mill always kept a flock of chickens, a few turkeys, and quite a flock of geese and ducks. The ducks and geese would swim on the mill pond and in the springtime when the geese were laying eggs they would be locked up in a shed at night until they had laid their eggs in early morning. Otherwise if they were left out in the water they laid their eggs along the banks of the pond in the water, and most often the eggs were chilled and wouldn't hatch. But by locking them up in the shed until morning the eggs were fertile and were hatched in an incubator, and a large flock of geese were raised every year. They were very delicious. Baked goose is undoubtedly one of the finest meals that you can be served.

Each spring when the geese began to shed their feathers, the feathers would be plucked off the breast of the geese where the down and small feathers are, and these feathers then would be made into feather beds and pillows, so that they furnished a comfortable place to sleep; especially warm and nice in the winter time. These feathers taken from the geese would have been just naturally shed at this time of the year, and it was not painful for the goose to have the feathers plucked. It was a relief to them, because in the hot weather they were uncomfortable for the goose anyway. It was quite easy to lay the goose on his back on a gunny sack, between your knees, with his head down so he couldn't bite you, and the feathers would just rub off in handfuls, so it was an easy matter to pluck the geese.

Mr. Johnson always had a large herd of pigs, because in the mill there were lots of waste grains - screenings, they were called. When the wheat was dumped on the mill it went through screens that took out the wild oats, weed seeds, and contaminating substances, and most farmers didn't want to sow these seeds back on their farms, so they just left them at the mill, and this is what the pigs would eat. There was a pig farm that went down from off the bluff where they were fed, down into the bottoms where there was a slough in the warm weather; and in the winter time they slept under the bluff in a cave, out of the storm and the wind. It was an ideal place to raise pigs, and they supplemented the income of the mill and provided the family with fresh meat, and helped considerably in the economic struggle that early-day people had in this valley.

The day Mr. Johnson bought the mill, the creamery that was situated in the hollow south of the mill mysteriously caught fire in the night and burned to the ground. Of course there was no fire department and no way of putting the fire out, and about all

anyone could do was stand and watch the fire burn and hope and pray that the sparks wouldn't blow over into the mill and burn it also. It happened that there was no wind, and so no sparks came towards the mill, and the mill was saved without any damage. This place where the water was stored to run the creamery was later used as a camp ground, called the "dry pond" for the Indians to camp, and for the other people who came to the mill and stayed while their grain was being ground. There was one man who came from Wallsburg who had a large polygamous family there, and he would always come in the night. When he came nobody would know that he was there until they got up in the morning and discovered that his outfit was camped over in the dry pond. He always brought a big chunk of cooked meat wrapped in a horse blanket, which he used for his food. He had bread with him and would make sandwiches from slices of meat that he would whittle off this huge piece of cooked meat.

The mill was operated with water power. The water was taken out of the Bircumshaw Springs north of the mill about a mile and a half, and floated in a ditch into the mill-pond where it was stored. The millpond could store enough water in the night with the inflow of the stream from the springs to operate it all through the day. During the war years when it was run day and night, a dam was built across the river to enlarge the water flow from the springs, in order to increase the amount of water available to operate the mill twenty-four hours a day. When the water went through the water wheel it was carried in a ditch, then down into the river again where it was picked up by the farmers for irrigation down in the south fields. This was easy to do because the mill was run in the daytime and the water would naturally drain from the pond and then back into the river for their convenience.

In the early part of the 1900's the millpond provided a crop in the winter time also. Ice was sawed from the pond in large blocks and stored in sawdust in ice houses for uses in the summer time. At that time there was no electricity, so refrigeration was made possible by storing ice and using the ice in the summer time in ice refrigerators.

Living at the mill house brought special challenges to the Johnson family members. There were no near neighbors - the nearest house being almost a mile away. Winters were long and harsh, as they often are in this valley, and the road to the mill was rough and was muddy in wet weather, making passage through difficult. There was never any running water in the house, and never an indoor bathroom. When the children were young they walked to school and church, or rode a horse or bicycle to Heber when they were old enough for High School, although as the years went by a horse-drawn bus or sleigh were provided by the school district. Their social contacts were few, except for the people who came to the mill for business purposes. Still, life there was good in many ways. They were almost self-sustaining because of the many things they produced, and they grew to love reading, and learning, music and other good things because of the home environment their good parents provided.

"Midway Memories," Swiss Days 1982